

Message Text

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INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06
IO-13 OMB-01 HA-05 EB-08 COME-00 TRSE-00 /090 W
-----014686 162315Z /17

R 162056Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8522

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 SANTIAGO 1886

E.O. 11652: GDS
SUBJ: PINT, SHUM, CI
SUBJ: CHILEAN POLITICIANS: STILL AROUND, LITTLE CHANGED

1. SUMMARY: THE PINOCHET GOVERNMENT DETESTS POLITICIANS OF THE OLD SCHOOL AND THE "MONOPOLY OF POWER" IT SAYS POLITICAL PARTIES HELD BEFORE THE 1973 COUP. AS BECAME CLEAR DURING A RECENT SERIES OF LUNCHEONS WITH CONSERVATIVE AND CENTER POLITICIANS, HOWEVER, CHILE'S TRADITIONAL POLITICAL PATTERNS PERSIST IN SPITE OF GOC ATTEMPTS TO SNUFF THEM OUT. WHILE THE POLITICIANS ACCEPT SOME RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE BREAKDOWN OF THE SYSTEM AND ALLENDE'S CHAOS, FOR DIFFERENT REASONS THEY ARRIVE AT THE SIMILAR CONCLUSION THAT THE PROJECTED "NEW INSTITUTIONALISM" WILL NOT WORK. CONSERVATIVE "NATIONALS" BELIEVE THAT PINOCHET'S CURRENT ADVISERS CANNOT PUT TOGETHER AN EFFECTIVE BASE OF SUPPORT. "DEMOCRATIC RADICALS" OPPOSE WHAT THEY SEE AS PINOCHET'S MEGALOMANIA. CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS WANT PINOCHET REPLACED BY A TRULY INTERIM MILITARY REGIME LEADING THE WAY TO RESTORATION OF A SLIGHTLY MODIFIED TRADITIONAL LIBERAL DEMOCRACY. CERTAINLY THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS ARE THE MOST IMPRESSIVE, BUT THEY HAVE MADE MANY ENEMIES, AND PAST ANTAGONISMS ARE STILL FRESH IN THE MINDS OF DEMOCRATIC RADICALS
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AND NATIONALS. NONE OF THE POLITICIANS HAD A CLEAR VIEW OF HOW DEMOCRACY COULD, REALISTICALLY, COME TO BE RESTORED IN CHILE. BUT THE VERY FACT THAT THEY COULD BE GATHER IN LIKE-MINDED GROUPS FOR OUR LUNCHEONS INDICATED THAT POLITICAL ACTIVITY CONTINUES AND MAY BE REVIVING. END SUMMARY.

2. THREE FACES OF "OPPOSITION": THREE LUNCHEONS
EMBASSY OFFICERS ARRANGED FOR THE AMBASSADOR PRIOR
TO THE CHIEFS OF MISSION MEETING CONSISTED OF NATIONALS
(PN) (NOT, AS THE GUESTS THEMSELVES MADE CLEAR,
FASCISTS-STYLE "NATIONALISTS"), DEMOCRATIC RADICALS
(DR) AND CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS (PDC). SUPERFICIALLY,
BOTH THE PN AND DR WOULD SEEM MORE COLLABORATORS THAN
OPPONENTS OF THE PINOCHET GOVERNMENT. ALL THREE
GROUPS HAVE PROBLEMS WITH THE CURRENT GOVERNMENT,
HOWEVER. AS DESCRIBED BELOW, THE PN BASICALLY LIKES
WHAT THE GOC IS DOING IN SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND INTERNAL
SECURITY FIELDS BUT FEARS IT CANNOT PUT TOGETHER A
POPULAR BASE OF SUPPORT ENSURING A CONTINUATION OF ITS
POLICIES. THE DR HAS COME TO FEAR PINOCHET'S PERSONAL
AMBITION (IT IS IN THRALL TO GENERAL LEIGH). THE PDC,
OF COURSE, HAS MANY POINTS OF OPPOSITION.

3. THE PN: PEDRO IBANEZ, LONG-TIME LIBERAL SENATOR,
BUSINESSMAN AND MEMBER OF THE COUNCIL OF STATE DOMINATED;
EX-CONSERVATIVES ENGELBERTO FRIAS AND FERNANDO OCHAGAVIA
COULD HARDLY GET A WORD IN. IN SPITE OF IBANEZ' OBVIOUS
SYMPATHIES FOR THE GOC'S OBJECTIVES AND HIS PERSONAL
LOYALTY TO PINOCHET, HE FAULTS THE GOVERNMENT FOR NOT
GETTING THE "ECONOMIC RIGHT" TOGETHER WITH THE "POLITICAL
RIGHT". IBANEZ CONTENDS THAT THE ECONOMIC RIGHT'S
LACK OF IDEOLOGICAL COMMITMENT AND ITS READINESS TO
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DEPEND UPON PINOCHET LEAVES THE COUNTRY VULNERABLE
SHOULD PINOCHET WOBBLE. ALL THREE CONCURRED THAT THE
GOC MAKES EGREGIOUS AND UNNECESSARY MISJUDGMENTS (SUCH
AS BANISHING THE PDC DOZEN), PRESUMABLY AVOIDABLE IF
IT SOUGHT THE GOOD ADVICE AVAILABLE FROM THE LIKES OF
OUR GUESTS.

4. WE COULD SENSE TENSIONS BETWEEN THE LIBERAL AND
CONSERVATIVE PARTICIPANTS DURING THE MEAL IN SPITE OF
THEIR PROTESTATIONS THAT THE PN WAS OF ONE MIND. IN
A SEPARATE CONVERSATION EARLIER WITH FORMER LIBERAL
PATRICIO PHILLIPS, WE HEARD A MORE CANDID VIEW OF THE
SCHISMS WITHIN THE PN, ANTI-PATHY TOWARD THE PDC, AND
"INCOMPETENCE" OF SUCH PINOCHET ADVISERS AS JAIME
GUZMAN. IN SUM, THE PN'S CONCERNS ARE NOT SO MUCH
THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE INCUMBENT REGIME (ALTHOUGH THERE
ARE DEGREES OF OPPOSITION, BUT WITH ITS INABILITY TO
BUILD OUTSIDE SUPPORT.

5. IBANEZ BECAME VERY UNCOMFORTABLE WHEN WE (AND
OCHAGAVIA) PRESSED HIM FOR A PLAN FOR THE FUTURE.
HE NEVER DID PRODUCE ONE. WE SUBSEQUENTLY LEARNED

THAT IBANEZ HAD EXPRESSED IRRITATION AT THE EMBASSY'S
INTEREST IN HOW TO ACCELERATE THE TRANSITION PROCESS
AND AT THE EMBASSY'S EFFORTS TO MEET WITH GROUPS
BASED ON TRADITIONAL POLITICAL ALIGNMENTS.

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IO-13 OMB-01 HA-05 EB-08 COME-00 TRSE-00 /090 W
-----014716 162316Z /17

R 162056Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8523

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 SANTIAGO 1886

THE DR: GENERAL LEIGH'S PRINCIPAL CIVILIAN ADVISER,
JORGE OVALLE, DOMINATED CONVERSATION AMONG THIS GROUP OF
DEMOCRATIC (I.E. CONSERVATIVE) RATIONALS. THEY HAVE
DRIFTED AWAY FROM OTHER DR(S SUCH AS JULIO DURAN, WHO
HAVE REMAINED STAUNCHLY IN THE PINOCHET CAMP. WE WERE
STRUCK AT OUR GUESTS' OBVIOUS DISLIKE OF WHAT THEY DE-
SCRIBED AS A "MILITARY DICTATORSHIP". THEY BELIEVE
PINOCHET WANTS TO CONSOLIDATE HIMSELF AS A FRANCO-STYLE
RULER AND CAN BEST BE PREVENTED FROM DOING SO BY A PROMPT
TRANSITION TO DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT. THEY REVIEWED AT
LENGTH THE SCHISMS WHICH HAVE ERODED CHILEAN RADICALISM
OVER THE YEARS AND DESCRIBED THE FEASIBILITY OF REUNIFYING
A DEMOCRATIC CENTER UNDER THE BANNER OF SOCIAL DEMOCRACY.
THEY RETAINED, HOWEVER, A DEEP DISTRUST AND DISLIKE
OF THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS. ALTHOUGH THEY WOULD BE
PREPARED TO COMPETE WITH THE PDC ONCE THE TRANSITION
CAME ABOUT, THEY INSISTED THAT THE MILITARY'S ABHORRENCE
OF FREI AND THE PDC PREVENTED CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS
FROM TAKING THE LEAD IN THE TRANSITION PROCESS ITSELF.
TO AVOID A MILITARY VETO, THE TRANSITION TEAM HAD TO
COME ACROSS AS COLLABORATORS RATHER THAN OPPONENTS:
THIS WAS THE ROLE THE DR COULD ASSUME. (SEE SANTIAGO
0969 FOR AN OVERVIEW OF THE SCHISMS AMONG CHILEAN
RADICALS).

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7. THE PDC: LITTLE NEW EMERGED FROM THE LUNCHEON WITH THIS GROUP OF INDISPUTABLE OPPOSITION. PARTY PRESIDENT ANDRES ZALDIVAR HAD BEEN HELD OVER IN CARACAS SO PDC STALWARTS JUAN HAMILTON, RAUL MORENO AND RAFAEL TRONCOSO CARRIED THE BALL. THESE THREE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE PARTY'S CENTER-RIGHT ALSO BROUGHT ALONG TWO REPRESENTATIVES OF ITS CENTER-LEFT, MARIANO RUIZ AND GENERO ARRIAGADA. MOST OF THE CONVERSATION CENTERED ON THE PDC'S PLANS FOR A MAJOR DEMOCRATIC COALITION TO LEAD A RESTORATION TO TRADITIONAL LIBERAL DEMOCRACY THROUGH A GRADUAL PROCESS IN WHICH THE MILITARY WOULD CONTINUE TO RUN THE GOVERNMENT. THE SUBSTANCE OF THIS ARGUMENT WAS REPORTED IN SANTIAGO 1174.

8. COMMENT: THIS CROSS SECTION OF CONSERVATIVE AND CENTER PERSONALITIES SHARES RESENTMENT OF A GOVERNMENT WHICH HAS PREDICATED ITS LEGITIMACY ON THE FAILINGS OF POLITICIANS. FOR DIFFERENT REASONS, THE OLD POLITICIANS BELIEVE THEY STILL HAVE AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN CHILE'S FUTURE. WE COULD NOT HELP BUT BE STRUCK BY THE PDCERS' VITALITY. THEY WERE YOUNGER AND MORE DYNAMIC; THEY OBVIOUSLY THOUGHT OF THEMSELVES AS MEMBERS OF A DEFINED AND FUNCTIONING POLITICAL ORGANIZATION. WHEREAS ONE FIGURE DOMINATED IN OTHER LUNCHEONS, EVERY PDCER CONTRIBUTED EAGERLY TO THE CONVERSATION.

9. NEARLY HALF A DECADE INTO THIS REGIME, CHILEAN POLITICIANS ARE STIRRING; BUT TO JUDGE FROM THESE THREE LUNCHEONS, THEY ARE STILL A GOOD WAY FROM POSING A MAJOR THREAT TO PINOCHET. PART OF THE FUZZINESS ABOUT REALISTIC ALTERNATIVES TO THE GOC STEMS FROM A VICIOUS CYCLE: THE FREEZE ON OPEN POLITICAL DEBATE MAKES IT DIFFICULT FOR

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THOSE DISSATISFIED WITH THE REGIME TO INTERACT WITH THE POLITY IN DEVISING CREDIBLE ALTERNATIVES; THE ABSENCE OF AN ATTRACTIVE ALTERNATIVE LESSENS PRESSURES ON THE GOC TO OPEN DEBATE. HOWEVER, THE CARPING AND WISHFUL THINKING TYPICAL OF CRITICS REMOVED FROM THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF POWER DO NOT SUBSTITUTE FOR EFFECTIVE ACTION TO CHANGE THE SITUATION.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLITICAL MILITARY RELATIONS, POLITICAL PARTIES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 16 mar 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978SANTIA01886
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780118-0109
Format: TEL
From: SANTIAGO
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780360/aaaabyiw.tel
Line Count: 222
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: b1efa1c5-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 07 jul 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3307930
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PINT, SHUM, CI : CHILEAN POLITICIANS: STILL AROUND, LITTLE CHANGED
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, CI
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/b1efa1c5-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014